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## Cutting and Preserving Whole Turkey

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### Recommended Citation

Brennand, Charlotte P. Ph.D, "Cutting and Preserving Whole Turkey" (1995). *Archived Food and Health Publications*. Paper 41.

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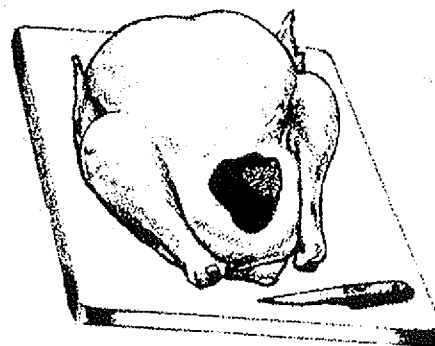


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**EXTENSION**

# Cutting and Preserving Whole Turkey

Charlotte Brennand, Extension Food Science Specialist



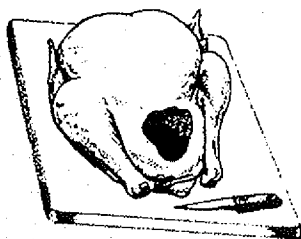
There are more uses for a turkey than roasting it whole for holiday occasions. The least expensive way to have turkey pieces, especially if the turkey is purchased on sale, is to cut it up yourself. The following is to serve as a butchering and processing guide.

## Starting with a Frozen Turkey

Birds can be thawed, cut up, and refrozen if care is taken in the temperature of the thawing process. Thaw the turkey in the refrigerator until it is possible to move a leg. If the giblets and neck stuffed into the cavity are still frozen solid, run tap water into the cavity until they can be removed. **DO NOT THAW THE TURKEY ON THE COUNTER TOP.** It is possible that the outside of the bird will get too warm and allow microbial growth. Microwave thawing is not recommended when the bird will not be cooked immediately. Turkey that will be refrozen should not reach a temperature above 40°F.

## CUTTING UP A WHOLE TURKEY

1. Lay turkey on its back on cutting board with neck cavity facing away. Remove giblets, neck, clip, and tail.



2. Remove metal clip by pulling clip away from turkey legs, then lift legs from clip one at a time. Squeeze clip to release hooks from back bone and remove.

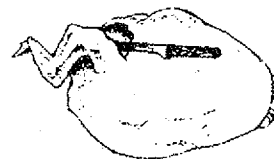
3. Pull tail out of body cavity and cut it off.

## Cut off wings

4. Roll turkey on its side, then forcefully pull the wing away from the body. Cut into the hollow between the breast and wing.



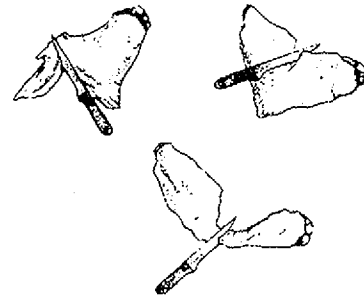
5. Continue pulling the wing away from the body. Cut around wing joint.



6. Bend wing back, exposing the joint. Cut through. Repeat for other wing.

### Cut wing into segments

7. Separate wing into three parts: Slice skin around joint at the small bony end. Bend back, exposing joint and cut through.

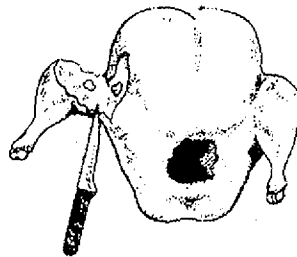


8. Cut through skin and slice skin around next joint.

### Remove drumstick and thigh

9. Cut through skin between the breast and thigh.

10. Cut down to the joint where thigh connects to back.

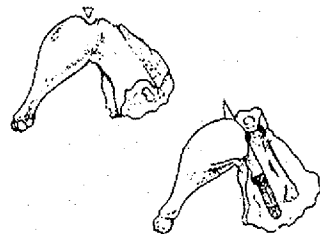


11. Push on drumstick and thigh to open joint at the back bone and cut through.

12. Repeat for other leg.

### Cut drumstick from thigh

13. Find the natural fat line between the drumstick and thigh then pull skin tightly over



top of leg, feeling for a small indentation to find the joint.

14. Lay thigh skin side down and, following above guides, cut through joint, bending drumstick back gently while cutting.

### Cut back from breast

15. Stand turkey up on neck joints and locate cartilage line running down ribs.

16. Separate back into two parts by counting two ribs in from tail and cutting through the natural joint.



17. Cut down ribcage to neck joints on both sides, bending the two parts away from each other to expose the joints.

18. Cut through shoulder joints on each side and cut through skin, separating breast and backbone.

### Cutting Tips

- ♦ Work on sanitized cutting surface
- ♦ Be sure hands and knives are clean and sanitized
- ♦ Use a sharp knife. Knife could be a boning knife, short knife or medium chef's knife.
- ♦ Turkey should be very cold and slightly stiff for easier cutting.
- ♦ Cover and refrigerate parts as soon as they have been cut.

## TURKEY BREAST

Turkey breasts can be left whole to use for roasting at a later time or cut in half with bone still attached. Alternately, the breast can be boned-out and cut up as shown in the following diagrams.

### Skinning and boning the breast

1. Cut membrane between skin and meat. Pull off skin.



2. Start at neck cavity and cut along top edge of breast bone.



3. Cut along edge of wishbone and keelbone, peeling breast from bones, leaving as little meat on the bones as possible.



4. Remove half-breast and repeat for other side.



### Cutting steaks and slices/cutlets from the breast

1. Cut steaks by slicing half breast across the grain into 1/2 to 1 inch thick steaks.



2. Cut slices or cutlets by slicing half breast across the grain into 1/8 to 1/3 inch thick cutlets.

## TURKEY LEGS

Turkey legs may be left as the whole drumstick-thigh for later roasting, cut into drumstick and thigh portions. The thigh can be boned-out as follows.

### Boning the thigh

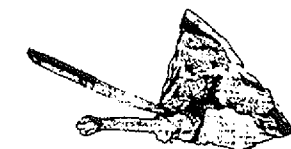
The turkey thigh is easy to debone. Turkey thigh meat can be used in any recipe or preparation calling for beef chuck or round, or the boned thigh may be used to create a roulade.

1. Place the thigh skin-side down. Cut down to the bone, then along the full length of the bone.

2. To free the ends, slip the knife under the bone halfway down its length.



3. Cut away from hand, freeing one end of the bone from the flesh.



4. Turn the thigh around, lift the free end of the bone with one hand, and cut the other end free.

5. Reserve the bone for stock.

### FREEZING TURKEY PIECES

Wrap turkey pieces tightly in freezer wrapping paper or foil or use freezer-grade plastic bags. Label and place in freezer with space for air circulation between packages during the freezing process.

## TURKEY BROTH

Neck, giblets, wings and backs can be used to make broth. This will also yield a fair portion of cooked turkey meat. Boil turkey pieces in enough water to cover for about 2 hours or until the meat is very easy to separate from the bone. Take the pieces of turkey from the broth and if desired continue to boil the broth with the lid off to concentrate the broth. Separate turkey meat from skin and bones. Cooked turkey meat can be put back in broth for use in turkey soup, Brunswick stew, turkey and noodles, etc. or used alone in dishes such as turkey salad.

Broth can be stored for 2 or 3 days in the refrigerator. To freeze the broth, pour into a freezer carton or a glass canning jar, preferably straight-sided. If a glass jar is used, be sure to leave about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch space between the top of the liquid and the beginning of the curve on the jar to allow for expansion. Cover tightly, label and place in freezer.

To can the broth, put still hot broth in canning jars, wipe lip of jar, and adjust lids. To can pieces of turkey, fill canning jars with raw or cooked turkey pieces, if cooked add hot broth to cover. Leave  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch headspace. Add 1 tsp. salt per quart if desired. Process using the following times and pressures:

### Processing Times & Pressures at Various Altitudes

Broth: 20 minutes for pints, 25 minutes for quarts

Meat: 75 minutes for pints, 90 minutes for quarts

#### Dial-gauge pressure canners

0-2000 feet	12 lb.
2001-6000 feet	13 lb.
6001-8000 feet	14 lb.

#### Weighted-gauge pressure canners

0-1000 feet	10 lb.
above 1001 feet	15 lb.

**Acknowledgment:** Cutting diagrams supplied by the National Turkey Federation, 11319 Sunset Hills Road, Reston, Virginia.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. (5C/3-95/DF)